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Ritual Orders and Ritologiques

A Terminological Quest for Some Neglected Fields of Study

Ritual studies is an ever-expanding field of scholarly enquiry. In 1985, Ronald Grimes, one of the main exponents and creative agents in that field published a bibliography covering some 1633 items (Grimes 1985). The number must have multiplied by now and I guess that nobody would dare to venture on an update of that bibliography. Simply too much has been published since then. Therefore, any general statement on the state of the art of ritual studies may seem either naive or hazardous. Thus, my tentative remarks in what follows must be taken with a good dose of caution.

The topic I want to address in these pages lies at the crossroads between ritual studies and ritual theory.¹ In order to get an idea of the field of study I would like to focus on, it may be useful to distinguish between the following general approaches to the study of ritual. To begin with, ritual theory in the strict sense, i.e. with explanatory ambitions etc., tends to focus on RITUAL as such: what IT is, what IT does, how IT works ("functions"), and why IT is as it is.² Softer varieties of ritual theory, e.g. approaches that wish to foster a better "understanding" of what goes on when rituals are being performed, may focus on RITUALS in a semi-empirical and semi-theoretical fashion. As a matter of fact, to a large extent ritual "theory" seems to be the result of theoretical reflections on matters of empirical research.³ Apart from that, we find studies of this and that phenomenon (e.g. time, space, violence, aesthetics, media, etc.) in relation to rituals ("ritual and time", "ritual and space", etc.). Then, of course, we have a good dose of studies on different "types", "classes", or "groups" of rituals. Most popular, I would guess (in the absence of any statistical evidence), are studies of "sacrifice", "rites of passage", and "initiations", with "healing rituals" and "pilgrimages" as ever more successful runner-ups.⁴ Correspondingly, there

1 For an extensive survey of current approaches to ritual theory see Kreinath, Snoek and Stausberg 2003.

2 For a penetrating critique of such approaches see Handelman 1998 and 2003.

3 That seems to be the case with Victor W. Turner and most of his students.

4 In his bibliography from 1985, Grimes discusses sixteen "Ritual Types" (rites of passage, marriage rites, funerary rites, festivals, pilgrimage, purification, civil ceremony,

is a number of studies about any variety of any class of rituals among the so-and-so people ("initiation among the NN"). Moreover, there are plenty of books about the rituals of this and that religion or people⁵ – in colonial times often published under such titles as "The customs and ceremonies of the NN". Last but not least, there is an overwhelming amount of studies devoted to the presentation or analysis of single rituals.

As any reader must have noticed, this is a very rough sketch, indeed. The sketch is merely the background to another field of scholarly inquiry for which I will suggest the overall term of "ritologiques". "Ritologiques" studies what I will call "the orders of rituals", that is, interrelated units of rituals. In this paper, I will draw attention to this field by pointing to some scattered contributions that have already been undertaken in this direction.

Ritual density and ritual systems

It goes without saying that I am far from the first person to note that something ought to be done here. With her tremendous wide reading, Catherine Bell has – as I discovered when I was preparing the first draft of this paper – already pointed in the direction that I would like to invite the reader to explore. Bell phrases her observations as follows: "How rites relate to each other within a ritual system and how such systems differ from each other may be one of the most undeveloped areas in the study of ritual. Too often attention has focused on either one dominant ritual or a comprehensive cataloguing of all ritual activity." (Bell 1997: 173.) Bell proposes to discuss that problem as part of what she calls "ritual density", a topic that she defines in the following terms: "why some societies or historical periods have more rituals than others" (Bell 1997: 173).

To my eyes, however, far from being new that question seems to be a recurrent topic in ritual theory. It was discussed extensively in earlier stages of the history of ritual studies, under the dominance of functionalist paradigms. Probably, this problem was even one of the reasons why rituals started to attract as much attention as they do. Thus, way back in 1962, the topic Bell ingeniously terms "ritual density" had been phrased by Max Gluckman – who, for this issue, explicitly refers back to Arnold van Gennep – thus: "I try to produce a general proposition to explain one problem set by van Gennep: Why is it that in tribal society there is on the whole greater ritualization of transitions in social status, and greater ritualization indeed of social relationships in general, than there is in modern society?"

rituals of exchange, sacrifice, worship, magic, healing rites, interaction rites, meditation rites, rites of inversion, ritual drama).

5 I am currently involved in a work of this kind: a systematic account of Zoroastrian rituals (Stausberg 2003).

(Gluckman 1962: 2.) In other words: the question of "ritual density" ultimately raises the question of the specific qualities of "modern society". Ritual theory here is a theory of modernization, and to talk about tribal rituals ultimately helps to explain our own ("modern") society.⁶

But Bell raises two other interesting questions: (a) how do rituals relate to each other within a ritual system and (b) how do such systems differ from each other? The latter question obviously points to a comparative study of rituals, but how about the former? The question of the interrelations of different rituals points at precisely that "dimension" of the study of rituals that I want to address in this paper. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the notion of "system" that Bell employs seems to be a very loose one.⁷ If I understand her correctly, Bell points to the hypothesis that rituals are related to each other within a somehow coherently structured whole.

Religious ritual systems

With E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley we come across a theory (of religion/ritual) in which the notion of "system" is of major importance: (in the 1990 version) their theory centres around the notion of "symbolic-cultural systems" in general and "religious ritual systems" (or simply "ritual systems") in particular.⁸ However, even Lawson and McCauley who are usually rather sensitive to matters of terminology do not seem to pay much attention to the overall notion of "system".

While they claim that the theory they outline "is a theory of religious ritual competence rather than [...] a theory of actual ritual acts" (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 77), their book nevertheless contains some interesting remarks on "the relation of those [= religious (MSt.)] rituals to one another and to the religious system overall" (1990: 121). Lawson and McCauley, however, restrict their focus to the question: which rituals are more "central", more "essential", and more "fundamental" than others within a religious system (1990: 125)?⁹ They argue: "All religious rituals involve super-

6 Nevertheless, it may still merit further investigations if "modern" (Western) society is less ritualized than non-modern societies, or if it is merely ritualized differently.

7 The same can be said about e.g. Clifford Geertz who talks a great deal about "cultural systems", but at the same time restricts the meaning of the word "system" when he states: "Cultural systems must have a minimal degree of coherence, else we would not call them systems; and, by observation, they normally have a great deal more. But there is nothing so coherent as a paranoid's delusion or a swindler's story" (Geertz 1983: 17–18).

8 In what follows, I am not concerned with their theory as such. For a critique see Levine 1998. See also Houseman and Severi 1998: 188–92.

9 It is to be noted that they explicitly write about "religious systems" in that context – not, as I had expected, about "ritual systems".

human agents at some point or other in their representation" (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 124). As they hold that the involvement of the "superhuman agents" is the distinguishing feature of a (religious) ritual, "the most central religious rituals are always those where the gods themselves directly act. The more directly active a superhuman agent is in a ritual, the more fundamental that ritual will prove to the overall religious system" (1990: 125).

This *Principle of Superhuman Agency* is constrained by another "principle", the *Principle of Superhuman Immediacy*. "The principle can be summarized as follows: the fewer enabling actions to which appeal must be made in order to implicate a superhuman agent, the more fundamental the ritual is to the religious system in question" (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 125). Moreover, they argue "that rituals in which superhuman agents are immediately involved (regardless of their roles) will always enjoy a more prominent place in the religious system than will those in which those agents only appear within an embedded, enabling action" that had occurred previously (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 126). Therefore, "Jesus establishing the church", according to Lawson and McCauley, is a more "fundamental" or "central ritual" for the "religious system" of Catholic Christianity, than the Eucharist (where the agent appears within the frame of action that has been set previously).

Of course, no historian of religion would seriously call "Jesus instituting the church" a ritual.¹⁰ In the generally accepted line of thought, we would call that for example a myth. It is certainly counter-intuitive and against scholarly consensus to call it a "ritual". In order to transform a "myth" into a "ritual" and mask this transformation and then hide the essential weakness of their argument, Lawson and McCauley invent the category of "hypothetical rituals",¹¹ most of which were "situated at the outset of a religious system's history" (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 127), that is, *in illo tempore*.

Moreover, Lawson and McCauley's line of reasoning seems circular to me. Thus, they keep on alternating premise and conclusion. Compare the following two statements: (1) [Premise:] "If the successful completion of a ritual is a precondition for undertaking others, [Conclusion:] then the first ritual will be more central than the others to the religious system in question" (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 126). A little further below in the very same paragraph, however, conclusion and premise change order: (2) [Premise 2 = conclusion 1:] "In general the more fundamental a ritual is to a religious system, [Conclusion 2 = premise 1:] the greater the probability

10 The question of whether there was ever anything like "Jesus instituting the church" from a historical point of view is a different matter.

11 These are not to be confused with the purely theoretical rituals invented by Vedic ritualists (on which see Staal 1989: 88).

that it will be presupposed in the performance of other rituals" (Lawson and McCauley 1990: 126). While these games of twisting logic create the appearance of scientific "predictions" (although they are nothing more than implications within the logical structure of their arguments) are rather unsatisfactory, Lawson and McCauley also turn to "religious systems' histories and variations" (1990: 127) as a further criterion of a ritual's centrality in that system. However, as I find their conclusions rather shallow, I don't want to discuss this criterion in detail. In general, it seems that they tend to project an argumentative logic of theory building towards the phenomena to be observed, and their insistence on a clear centrality of some rituals gives a "theological flavour" to their reasoning. (See also Houseman and Severi 1998: 191.) All this makes their theory much less relevant to the field of study to be explored here than it may look at first sight.¹² Could system-theory contribute something to reflecting on different "architectures" of systems?

System-theory and ritual systems

At least in Germany, inspired by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann,¹³ system-theory has had a strong influence on many fields within the humanities (see Gripp-Hagelstange 2000),¹⁴ including the study of religion in many forms (from theology to *Religionswissenschaft*), while it seems not to have had any impact on ritual studies at all.¹⁵ Thus, it may be useful to spend some preliminary thoughts on system-theory and "ritual systems". In the first chapters of what is perhaps his most comprehensive work – *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (1987 [1984]) – Luhmann gives a survey of what he considers to be the basic principles of recent system-theory, and some of these features may be tentatively applied to "ritual systems".¹⁶

12 The critique articulated here against this particular aspect of their approach (i.e., the question of its relevance to what is proposed here) should not be confused with a judgement on the general value of their theory (this matter being beyond the focus of this paper).

13 By now, there is a considerable amount of secondary literature on Luhmann available, including some introductory books (e.g. Reese-Schäfer 1992; Gripp-Hagelstange 1997). A search in my local University library (www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de) has resulted in some 78 hits with Luhmann in the title.

14 Luhmann has created his own jargon, and some scholars have already produced Luhmann-glossaries (Beraldi, Corsi and Esposito 1998; Krause 2001).

15 The exception confirming the rule is Günter Thomas (see Thomas 2003).

16 The following remarks are not more than a sketch. A full discussion would constitute an article in its own right, and would clearly go beyond the goal of this paper. Luhmann did not show much interest in rituals. Indeed, Luhmann himself would probably reject the following thoughts, for they partly contradict his evolutionary scheme.

First of all, Luhmann's theory is a theory of open systems (1987: 22), and that may be an appropriate point of departure for an analysis of any ritual system. The starting-point of system-theory is the difference between a system and its environment. Every system by necessity is distinguished from its environment, and all systems construct and maintain themselves by creating and upholding a fundamental difference to their respective environments (Luhmann 1987: 35). In the case of ritual systems this point is easily taken: ritual systems are obviously constructed and maintained in such a way as to make clear that what falls out of these systems is "non-ritual", i.e. part of their environment. Boundary maintenance is part of system maintenance (Luhmann 1987: 35), and thus any "ritual system" should be eager to uphold its distinctiveness from other systems (= ritual/non-ritual).

Luhmann further distinguishes between the environment of a system ("non-rituals" as compared to "ritual"), and different systems within that environment (Luhmann 1987: 36-37). This is a very interesting point for ritual studies, because the increasing awareness that rituals do not necessarily belong to the functional sphere of "religion" has created some confusion among students of religion. Supposing that there is something as a "ritual system", however, "religion", "law", and "sports" may all be social systems in the environment of a ritual system. According to Luhmann, the distinction between system and environment that is at the heart of the construction/maintenance of any system is then repeated *within* each system. This leads to the formation of sub-systems, and the main system turns out to be the environment for the resulting sub-systems. In this way, the internal complexity of the system is strongly increased. This can take the form of internal differentiation and hierarchy (Luhmann 1987: 37-39), and these features can readily be observed in ritual systems.

This observation corresponds to another fundamental principle of system-theory: the distinction between element and relation. As differentiated and complex unities, systems consist of elements that are related to each other. In other words: in systems, one finds neither unrelated elements nor "pure" relations without elements. Contrary to received wisdom, Luhmann argues that elements are not to be regarded as the independent building blocks (basic units) of systems, but rather that it is the system that qualifies its elements *as elements*. Every element of a system may in itself be a highly complex composite unit, but viewed from the system it is regarded as a non-soluble unit. Therefore, Luhmann argues, higher-order systems may actually be structured in a less complex way than the lower-thought may be of extreme relevance to an analysis of ritual systems and to ritual theory in general. To begin with a prominent example from the realm of theory: basic to Catherine Bell's theory of what she (in a somewhat confusing analogy with ethnological jargon) calls "ritualization" is the idea

that "ritualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful" (Bell 1992: 90). From Luhmann's point of view, that would hardly make sense and would need to be re-described in the following terms: it is the ritual system that qualifies an element – e.g., an action – as such (i.e., as a ritual action), and not the other way round. In other words: the strategy of ritualization needs to be linked to a ritual system in order for a specific way of acting to appear as "ritualized action". In a way, Bell describes something very similar to Luhmann, but on a much lower level: she describes, how an action constructs its environment (or differentiates itself from an environment). From Luhmann's point of view, however, for any element to qualify as such – for an act to become "ritualized", i.e. an element within a ritual system – a system is required. Moreover, Luhmann's thoughts may be applied to an analysis of ritual systems: partaking of food, for instance, is a very complex mechanism, but by becoming an element of a ritual system (by becoming "ritualized", as Bell would put it), it may be regarded as a non-soluble unit, and in many instances, within a ritual performance, it may be reduced to a very simple gesture. When viewed from that perspective, rituals that at first sight may seem very complex and intricate, such as some "Vedic" rituals, actually show a reduced form of complexity when compared to the units they are composed of.

Complexity, then, is another basic principle of system-theory, and complexity, as the reader may have anticipated from the previous discussion, is here conceptualized in terms of elements and relations. Contrary to what many of us would expect when confronted with the notion of complexity, however, Luhmann suggests calling a number of related elements "complex" if it is no longer possible to connect each and every element with each other. Thus, a higher degree of complexity involves increasing restrictions on inter-connections. Complexity requires selection, for it selects which elements can be connected with each other. Therefore, increasing complexity necessarily goes hand in hand with a reduction of complexity and the corresponding selective conditioning of this reduction (Luhmann 1987: 45–47). Only complexity, Luhmann argues in a seemingly paradox fashion, can reduce complexity.¹⁷ This seemingly paradoxical argument, it appears to me, can again be fruitfully applied to an analysis of ritual systems, for the design of apparently very complex rituals (or ritual systems) clearly presupposes an enormous reduction of complexity. There is no *anything goes* in complex rituals, but there is a very clear "logic of design" (Handelman 1998) in rituals (or ritual systems) that considerably restricts the range of possible connections between their single "elements" (be it rites, rituals, or sequences of/in rites/rituals). Moreover, from a

17 "Nur Komplexität kann Komplexität reduzieren" (Luhmann 1987: 49).

functional point of view, one wonders if one may tentatively formulate the hypothesis that the most complex rituals are generally held to possess the greatest power to reduce environmental (= non-ritual) complexity.

While it is generally assumed that systems must in some way or other “adapt” to their environments, Luhmann makes the point that complex systems also have to adapt to their own level of complexity. That is, they must be able to deal with their own improbabilities and inadequacies. Therefore, they have to create instances to deal with these problems, for instance by producing agencies or facilities that aim at reducing divergent behaviour. Thus, complex systems are forced to self-adaptation, that is, *they themselves* have to adapt to *their own complexity* (Luhmann 1987: 56). Now, this is a particular well-known aspect of many ritual systems, especially those that have developed a professional infrastructure: they have to establish complex strategies of education, controlling (see Rüpke 1996), and correction of mistakes (see also Gladigow 2003) in order to reproduce their own level of complexity.

One further basic principle of system-theory is what Luhmann calls self-reference.¹⁸ This concept refers to the unity that each system constitutes for itself, as distinct from the unity it constitutes in an outside view by an observer. The unity of a system is not just there, but is the result of an operation that creates a self-referential relation. In that way, the constitution of a system always goes along with a reference to this very process of its self-constitution, and self-referential systems operate with self-contact as their main contact with their environment. In this mode of operation, these systems are necessarily closed systems. (Luhmann 1987: 57–60.) Apart from communication, all social systems, Luhmann argues, have to continuously define their specific mode of operation; they have to fix their identities in order to determine what is essential for their self-reproduction – and what has to be reproduced in order to maintain the system as such. Therefore, the self-referential (and autopoietic) reproduction of the system has to stick to those typical features of the elements that define the system as such (Luhmann 1987: 61). For ritual systems, this hypothesis implies that they can only be reproduced if they reproduce rituals (with “ritual” constituting the typical feature of the elements that in turn define the identity of a ritual system). That may sound rather banal, but it isn’t, because it implies that a ritual system cannot be reproduced by non-ritual means, e.g. by scholarly discourse about rituals, or by conferring intellectual or symbolic “meaning” to rituals in a medium different from ritual itself. The idea of self-reference seems to imply that a ritual system necessarily goes along with a reference to it being a *ritual* system.

18 Related concepts are self-organization and autopoiesis.

At the outset, I warned the reader that the above argument was more a sketch than anything else – maybe inviting one or other to further explore possible applications of system-theory to the study of rituals (be it ritual studies or ritual theory). The foregoing remarks were an attempt to illustrate the possibility of such an application already on the level of the basic principles of system-theory (as developed by Niklas Luhmann). Clearly, there is much more to system-theory that could be made use of. In order to avoid misunderstandings I should clarify that I certainly do not claim that system-theory is the one and only, or even a major, key to the study of rituals. Nevertheless, I find it useful to apply system-theory for an analysis of ritual systems instead of using the notion of “system”, as is done more often than not in ritual studies and theory, in a vague and almost metaphorical sense (in the sense of a loosely structured and apparently coherent whole).

Structuralism and “ritualistics”

If system-theory offers a possible theoretical approach to the study of how rituals are related to each other (within a ritual system), then how about structural or structuralist approaches? While Luhmann integrates the notion of “structure” into his theory (see Luhmann 1987: 377–487), he rejects the theoretical premises of structuralism. This is not my concern here, for I am merely interested in some contributions to the exploration of a certain field of studies that I feel has been unduly neglected in recent work. Taking into account the massive project of the structural study of myth that, for myth, has explored a field of study similar to what I have in mind for rituals (namely inter-related complexes of myth), a brief look at structural (or structuralist) contributions to the study of rituals may be worth the effort.

As Claude Lévi-Strauss states very clearly in a famous essay that was first published half a century ago (in 1953 and reprinted afterwards in his *Anthropologie Structurale*), the concept of “social structure” (and “structure”) in general does *not* refer to empirical reality, but to those *models* “which are built up after it” (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 279). Structures, in other words, are second-order models of reality. According to Lévi-Strauss, moreover, the best model will be that “which is *true*, that is, the simplest possible model which, while being derived exclusively from the facts under consideration, also makes it possible to account for all of them” (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 281). Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between two situations in which the scholarly endeavour of making such models finds itself: either the scholar will construct a model that corresponds to phenomena which are not perceived as a system by the society concerned, or he comes across models that the culture in question has already developed itself and offers as interpretations (to its members, and to outsiders)¹⁹ (Lévi-Strauss 1963:

281–82). Contrary to Luhmann, Lévi-Strauss does not dismiss such models *a priori* as irrelevant and he finds them occasionally even superior to those made by professional anthropologists. Therefore, he feels that the work of these indigenous theoreticians – “each culture has its own theoreticians” (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 282) – merits as much attention as those of his fellow anthropologists. Moreover, the errors that may be contained in these indigenous theories – errors, that is, from the standpoint of structural science – belong to the “facts” that the scholar is observing (and they may even be amongst the most significant facts).

As a matter of fact, when it comes to rituals, it would be naive to deny the indirect contribution of indigenous, local ritual theorists. Of course, our indigenous colleagues express their ritual theories in emic terms, and some of the languages they use may not even have a single term corresponding to our emic term “ritual”²⁰ which, in the course and context of scholarly discourse, has come to be considered an etic term (much like related terms such as “religion”, but also like seemingly unrelated terms such as “politics”, or “economics”). In ritual studies, the contribution of indigenous ritual theories and theoreticians – or experts, to use a less ambitious term – is evident in a number of ways, partly depending on the available methods and disciplines. Thus, most anthropological studies necessarily make use of local experts, and it is only recently that this procedure, which was simply considered as a natural fact not worthy of further notice (apart from prefaces) two generations ago, has attracted the attention it deserves (see e.g. Bell 1993). Some cultures or religions that have developed a fairly complex and professional ritual system have – with Luhmann we would argue: of necessity – produced indigenous disciplines of ritual studies. This is partly the case with Zoroastrianism,²¹ but the most conspicuous example is of course Vedic India and what Frits Staal has aptly termed the “(Indian) Science of Ritual” developed by indigenous authorities (Staal 1982; 1989: 349–67). I would suggest calling these forms of indigenous (systematic, theoretical, speculative) reflections on rituals – being as it were the art of the ritualists – “ritualistics”.²² In many ways, though, there is a

19 Luhmann (1987: 377) severely objects against this second alternative. In his view, this position endangers the freedom of scientific analysis.

20 Kreinath, Snoek and Stausberg 2003 contains a survey of a good number of languages and their emic equivalents to our notion of “ritual”.

21 Kreyenbroek 2003 discusses “the discipline of ‘ritual studies’ as taught by Zoroastrian religious authorities”.

22 This must not be confused with Podemann Sørensen’s (1993) suggestion of establishing “ritualistics” as a new sub-discipline of the history of religions. Admittedly, I do not find that suggestion very helpful because “ritual studies” is by now a recognized and recognizable scholarly project that can no longer be unilaterally appropriated by any single discipline, the history of religions being no exception.

continuum from “ritualistics” to “ritual studies” and, as the example of Frits Staal vividly illustrates, all the way to “ritual theory”.²³ Moreover, liturgical studies is something like indigenous (ecclesiastical) “ritualistics”, and the well-known work of Tom Driver (1991) may illustrate the intense interactions between “ritualistics” on the one hand, and “ritual studies” and “ritual theory” on the other.

The structure of rituals, music, and the structural study of “ceremonials”

But let us return to structuralism. Actually, considering the number of structural studies of myth or mythology, there has been very little effort to study rituals from a structuralistic point of view. As a matter of fact, Claude Lévi-Strauss clearly considered rituals secondary and inferior to myths. In the final passage of *L'homme nu* (*The Naked Man*), the last volume of his *Mythologiques*, he suggests studying ritual “in and for itself”, i.e. as “an object distinct from mythology” (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 668). However, he draws a rather unfavourable picture of rituals, going so far as to call them “a hopeless attempt, forever deemed to failure”, and a “bastardization of thought” (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 675). In other words: there is no structural analysis of rituals, there are no *Ritologiques*, because ritual is simply not worth the effort. On the other hand, though, Lévi-Strauss has pointed to two (complementary) structural mechanisms employed by “rituals”, which he calls “parcelling out and repetition” (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 672).

Lévi-Strauss regards rituals as inferior not only to myths, but also to music. Edmund Leach has followed up this comparison of rituals to musical scores (Leach 1976: 43–45).²⁴ Leach, who has fused the ideas of Lévi-Strauss with the tradition of British social anthropology, has given a much more prominent place to rituals than his French master, and the analogy with music has led him to articulate his famous thesis: “We engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves” (Leach 1976: 45). At the end of his book, Leach briefly sketches one example of interrelated complexes of rituals – what I here propose to call “ritologiques” – when he suggests to describe the Christian Mass, in general terms, as “a transformation of the Jewish Passover” (Leach 1976: 93).

23 Interestingly (but far from accidentally!), the defence of the Indian origin of the “science of ritual” is an integral part of Staal’s theory of ritual.

24 As things stand, the comparison (or analogy) of ritual and music is a recurrent topic in ritual theory. For some examples see Kapferer 1983: 255–62; Snoek 1987: 59; Staal 1989: 165–90; Cartry 1992 (see also below); Williams and Boyd 1993. The topic would certainly benefit from a more comprehensive study.

While Lévi-Strauss is the main inspiration for his theory, when it comes to ritual (despised by Lévi-Strauss), Leach recurrently refers back to Arnold van Gennep.²⁵ As a matter of fact, Arnold van Gennep's *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) – which started to have its overwhelming impact only after it was translated into English in 1960 – can be regarded as the first major attempt to analyze an intrinsic structure of rituals. Van Gennep, of course, does neither speak of “ritual systems” nor about “ritologiques”, but rather about “the order of ceremonies”, “ceremonial patterns” (1960: 10) or “ceremonial wholes” (1960: 191), that is ritual units consisting of several sub-units. These “sub-categories”, as van Gennep also calls them (1960: 11), are what he calls “rites”. Thus, the “ceremonial pattern” of rites of passage consists of “rites of separation”, “transition rites” and “rites of incorporation”.

Contrary to what is stated in most textbooks, however, van Gennep's “ceremonial pattern” does *not* consist of three, but of five steps (see Snoek 2003). Van Gennep himself gives a vivid description of that five-fold structure when he writes: “The basic procedure is always the same [...]: they [foreigners and natives (MSt.)] must stop, wait, go through a transitional period, enter, be incorporated” (1960: 28). Here, clearly, *five* steps are involved.

As I see it, a major limitation of this model lies in its spatial orientation. As the structure of the book clearly indicates, it is conceptualized according to the pattern of the territorial passage (discussed in the second chapter). True enough, this processual model has been very fruitful – also in this respect, Victor Turner seems to be heir to van Gennep – but as a mono-directional pattern it is of limited value if one wants to focus on more complex structures of interrelated rituals (what I suggest calling “ritologiques”).

On the other hand, van Gennep's terminology indicates a very useful distinction: that between single “rites”, “ceremonial patterns”, and “ceremonial wholes”. In contrast with this, the terminology employed in the recent scholarly literature has concentrated almost exclusively on terms deriving from either *rite* or *ritual*. Ronald Grimes, for example, distinguishes between the terms “rite”, “ritual”, “ritualizing” and “ritualization” (1990: 9–10). When going beyond single “rites”, that is moving to the level of “some larger whole” consisting of several “rites”, Grimes does not introduce a separate term – such as “ceremony”, “ceremonial whole”, “ceremonial”, or “ceremonial wholes” – but rather (much like Catherine Bell) talks about “a ritual system or ritual tradition” (Grimes 1990: 10). “Ceremony” has, by now, I feel, come to denote a particular type, form, or style of ritual.²⁶

25 The legacy of van Gennep is evident (in Leach 1976) from such topics as boundaries and rites of transition that Leach discusses repeatedly and in detail.

26 Grimes 1998 distinguishes between six types of ritual experience: *Ritualisierung, Anstandsregel, Zeremonie, Magie, Liturgie, Feier*. Here, “ceremony” is mostly set in political contexts.

Rarely does even one and the same author use his terms in a consistent manner and terms are often employed without any explanation given.²⁷ A rare exception is Jan Snoek who, inspired by Melford E. Spiro's *Buddhism and Society* (1971) and *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, systematically /analytically distinguishes between "rite" (as the minimal building blocks of ritual action), "ceremony" (as a smaller configuration of "rites" constituting a "ritual whole"), "ceremonial" (as "a [collection of] rite[s], performed in a close period of time, during which no breaks take place which are long, compared to the duration of a ceremonial as a whole" [Snoek 1987: 58]), and "Rite" for the "total cult" (Snoek 1987: 60) in use.²⁸

Nowadays, however, "ceremony" has clearly lost its previous significance as denoting a unit ("whole") of several "rites" (or "rituals").²⁹ In empirical studies, of course, "ceremonies" and "ceremonials" (in the sense of Snoek) or "ceremonial pattern" and "ceremonial wholes" (in the sense of van Gennepe) are very much studied – the present volume contains some examples – and I feel that ritual studies would benefit from providing a name for these objects of study. This could possibly help to create an awareness that we are moving on a different level of analysis. But before discussing such terms, we should consider some more recent contributions to this field of study.

Liturgical orders and the organization of rites/rituals

With his concept of "liturgical order", Roy Rappaport has made what is probably the best-known attempt at moving in the direction of our questions. In a way, Rappaport's concept of "liturgical order", referring "to the more or less invariant sequences of rituals that make up cycles and other series" (1999: 169), reviews van Gennepe's notion of "ceremonial wholes",

27 Much to my surprise, I found that Michael Houseman and Carlo Severi occasionally make use of the adjective "ceremonial", e.g., when they talk about "complex ceremonial configurations" (1998: 185 [here I find the term appropriate]), "ceremonial behaviour" (1998: 187 [no explicit distinction is drawn between "ceremonial" and "ritual" behaviour!]), and "ceremonial situations" (1998: 204–05). Moreover, they sometimes use the substantive "ceremony"; thus, they refer to *Naven* as a "ceremony" (1998: xii), whereas, when referring to the *naven in toto*, they write about "the ritual as a whole" (1998: 203 [= heading of chapter eight]).

28 Although still found in major works of reference (see e.g. Lang 1993; Baudy 2001a and 2001b), the term "cult" has largely disappeared from the lexicon of ritual studies and ritual theory. Nowadays, it is mainly used (mostly in a derogatory manner) in the sense of "sects".

29 However, "ceremony", and "ceremonial" have also been used in a different manner, see e.g. Gluckman 1962: 24, 30.

and Rappaport here explicitly refers to van Gennep, "for he too was as much concerned with such sequences as he was with single rituals" (1999: 169). Because Rappaport's ideas are rather widely known and expressed clearly, I can limit myself to a brief sketch. With his concept of "order",³⁰ Rappaport has at the same time formulated a conceptual alternative to thinking in terms of "system" (and system-theory). By "order", Rappaport refers to "more or less coherent domains within which generally commensurable processes are governed by common principles and rules" (1999: 169). This may also apply to "the economic order". According to Rappaport, these "orders", which are not encoded by the actors, entail conformity on their part.

A certain limitation of this model, however, lies in the fact that Rappaport focuses primarily on the *sequential* ordering of performances, when he states: "they are orders in that they are more or less fixed sequences of acts and utterances, following each other 'in order'" (1999: 169). Of course, Rappaport's model is far more complex than can be sketched here, and I should at least mention two other dimensions of "liturgical orders": the hierarchical and the synchronic dimensions (Rappaport 1999: 170). But precisely in view of the complexity of the model that ultimately seeks to establish "liturgical orders" as "meta-orders, or orders of orders" (Rappaport 1999: 263), I don't quite see why Rappaport insists on the sequential aspect of "liturgical orders" as much as he does. While I agree that rites or rituals can be arranged (and analyzed) in a sequential manner (Gladigow 2003), this does not necessarily hold true for "liturgical orders" (i.e. the field of study that I call "ritologies"). Moreover, I find that it tends to be unclear what Rappaport is referring to: single "rites" (or rituals), or a (sequentially arranged) multitude of such rites or rituals (that is ceremonies / ceremonials / ceremonial patterns / ceremonial wholes)? For instance, Rappaport writes: "When an actor performs a liturgical order he participates in it, which is to say that he becomes a part of it, thus investing it with meaning of a profundity far beyond the ordinary" (1999: 276). While this may be perfectly true, I cannot see how an actor can "perform a liturgical order" (that is, if such an order is more than a single rite/ritual). As a meta-order, I feel, a "liturgical order" *orders* the (sequential) coherence of single performances, but cannot be performed as such. This is as if Rappaport were torpedoing his own theory.

Apart from Rappaport, some further contributions (by two French anthropologists) come to mind. In his essay "Aspects of the Organization of Rites", first published in French in 1979 and three years later in an English

30 As a matter of fact, van Gennep had also used the word "order": "The purpose of this book is altogether different. Our interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes – that is their order." (van Gennep 1960: 191.)

translation (but nevertheless ignored by Rappaport), Pierre Smith tried to uncover similar order(ing)s. In his essay, Smith aims at formulating a non-reductionist model for theorizing rituals. Instead of viewing rituals as the display of something else – such as society, myth, symbols – Smith declares his ambition “to clarify their incredible complexity and their captivating strangeness [...] by trying to find the principles of their own specific elaboration” (1982: 104). He draws attention to two such principles. The first of them he calls “focalizing elements”, i.e. “those acts around which the different sequences revolve and are organized” (Smith 1982: 104). According to Smith, these acts account for the performative efficacy of rituals, or – in his words: “a mysterious or mystical operation which cannot be reduced to the symbolism of the act performed” (1982: 104). Around these acts, Smith seems to construct a dialectical process: he suggests that what he calls “the kernel of rituals lies [...] in their encounter with [...] a certain type of ‘snare for thought’ [*piège à pensée*]” (Smith 1982: 106). In their turn, they only become “sacred” by their insertion in a preconceived ritual scheme. I did call that relationship “dialectical” in order to make it appear less contradictory, for I find it strange that Smith on the one hand emphasizes the “incredible complexity” of rituals and on the other hand, immediately afterwards, comes up with the idea of “the kernel of rituals”, an idea that heavily reduces the supposed complexity of their “elaboration”.

For this reason I find his formal analysis of the organization of rituals more promising. Here, Smith argues that every rite “is linked to circumstances which determine how it is performed, and these circumstances themselves form series. The various rites associated with circumstances of the same series tend to form a system.” (Smith 1982: 108.) The “series” or “systems” that Smith tries to establish are based on the circumstances that the rituals are linked to. Smith distinguishes between “four universal series of circumstances apt to determine the characteristics of ritual systems. For every rite is tied either to periodical or occasional circumstances; and these circumstances can, in either case, primarily affect either the life of the collectivity or that of the individuals.” (Smith 1982: 108.) Here, Smith makes use of well-established classifications of ritual. Annermarie de Waal Malefijt, for example, in her introduction to the anthropology of religion from 1968, had already distinguished individual from communal and periodic from non-periodic or occasional rituals (*apud* Snoek 1987: 78–79). According to Smith, the rites that are connected to a series of periodical circumstances “form a system along an axis of the syntagmatic type” (1982: 108), while those connected to specific, unforeseeable circumstances “form a system along an axis of the paradigmatic type” (1982: 109). Of course, both “systems” are interlinked in different ways and some types of ritual action, such as ritual killing, may occur in both “systems”, where they acquire different nuances (Smith 1982: 110).

A decade later, in 1992, another French ethnologist, Michel Cartry, drawing on field-work in Africa, approached our problem from a different angle. While Smith's idea of ritual systems is based on criteria that are external to single rites – making it a sort of meta-system – Cartry focuses on “the multiplicity of reappearances of common features from one ritual to another” (1992: 26). To take one example: one and the same song may reappear in different rituals. Apart from this example, music is again taken as a general paradigm regarded as able to conceptualize advanced stages of ritualistic complexity: Cartry sketches the idea that the “interdependence of the elements in the ritual” may be “analogous to the form that links the parts, or voices, of a musical score” (1992: 29). While the occurrence-based systems which Smith presupposes appear as something “natural”, with Cartry anthropology has turned reflexive in that he also raises the problem of the observer: inter-rituality (Gladigow 2003) is not a simple fact, but has to be uncovered by the observer in the field (or in the texts).

Conclusions: Ritologiques is the study of the orders of rituals

Cartry's essay is a good end-point for our brief survey, for Cartry is the first author who explicitly states that the analysis of our field of study is not just the uncovering of given facts (structures, systems, orders, or relations), but may also be the result of the scholar's active imagination. But what, after all, exactly is the field of study that I propose to devote more attention to? In the extant literature this field is referred to by one or more of the following designations: *ritual density*, (*religious*) *ritual systems*, *ritual tradition*, *ceremonial*, *ceremonial patterns*, *ceremonial wholes*, *liturgical orders*, *organization of rites*, *series of rituals*. Finally, I have introduced the terms *ritualistics* for a specific phenomenon and *ritologiques* for the whole field of study. The construction of the artificial word *ritologiques* makes clear that it refers to an etic discourse.

Let us go through the other terms one by one. The term “ritual density” – introduced by Catherine Bell – is useful, but restricted to a specific sub-field of “ritologiques” and to a limited set of questions closely linked to the debate about “modern” and “non-modern” societies (i.e., the sociological “othering”). Compared to “ritual density”, the term “ritual system” is broader and has attracted a number of scholars. The problem, however, is that the term “system” is usually employed in a very loose sense (thereby losing much of its potential).³¹ To an even greater extent, this holds true for

31 This is why I have tried briefly to explore the application of system-theory (with its much more explicit notion of “system”) to the study of rituals.

“ritual tradition” as well. Moreover, it is to be emphasized that both terms (*viz.* “ritual system”, and “ritual tradition”) refer to a specific unit, whereas “ritologiques” goes beyond these restrictions in that it also looks at the interrelations between different “ritual systems” or “ritual traditions” (examples: transformations, incorporations; see below). I have introduced the term “ritualistics” in order to refer to local, indigenous, emic ritual theories. Starting right from van Gennep, the terms “ceremony”, “ceremonial”, “ceremonial patterns”, and “ceremonial wholes” go clearly in the direction of the field of “ritologiques”. However, in view of the obvious semantic change of the word “ceremony”, it would seem awkward to re-introduce these terms into scholarly discourse. The attempt would be simply doomed to failure, despite its illustrious ancestors. The term “liturgical orders” (invented by Rappaport) revives that heritage, but – apart from specific problems with Rappaport’s theory – the adjective “liturgical” is probably not much of an improvement compared to “ceremonial”, and the term “liturgy” raises similar (if not identical) problems to “ceremony”, for both nowadays refer mostly to specific styles, forms, experiences or designs of rituals. Therefore, I will in future use the notion “orders of rituals”³² – and maybe others will follow suit.³³ The term “organization of rites” – introduced by Smith – could be a reasonable alternative to “orders of rituals”, but to my mind it smacks of a deliberate and well-institutionalized phenomenon, while “series of rituals” seems to resolve in that it refers to just one potential “order of rituals”.

To conclude: *Ritologiques is the study of orders of rituals*. This study can proceed in different ways, employ different methods – and the orders of rituals may be of different kinds and have different extensions (by, e.g., remaining within or going beyond single religious traditions).

Prospects: Sketching some series of concepts

In several of the contributions to ritologiques (i.e., studying the orders of rituals), music has been referred to as some sort of conceptual analogy. This analogy merits a separate study, but would certainly not cover the whole field of ritologiques. Another dominant comparative paradigm has been language. Possibly rhetoric or architecture could be discussed as well. The choice of any analogy or metaphor opens up new analytical potential while at the same time restricting the range of perspectives. Moreover, there

32 That may recall the title of Soeffner 1992. That book, however, discusses very different matters.

33 The term “ritual orders”, however, may evoke different associations (in the sense of “ritual organizations”).

is always the risk that analogies and metaphors impose their own implicit structures on the field to be observed.³⁴

Each of these disciplines has its own storehouse of terms that could be applied to the study of the orders of rituals (i.e., ritologiques). In this finale, I would like to suggest taking into consideration certain concepts which, I feel, could prove helpful for ritologiques. These terms are imported from recent literary theory (and therefore implicitly continue the line of ritologiques/linguistics analogy). What I find attractive about these terms is that they form series. That may improve their analytical application. Here, I will limit myself to the following series:

Transrinality / interrinality // archirrituals / pararrituals / hyperritrituals

It goes without saying that this series is constructed by replacing "text" by "ritual". Within the study of literature these terms were mainly designed by Gérard Genette. Just as "transtextuality" denotes all those (partly secret) forms in which texts relate to each other, "transrinality" is the way in which rituals relate to each other (and is thus almost identical to ritologiques). The notion of "architext" refers to the totality of all general types of discourse from which a single text derives. In a similar fashion, the concept of "archirritual" would refer to the totality of all types of ritual activities – including the basic genres – a single ritual relates to from a taxonomic point of view. Just as "paratexts" are those texts that are instruments in order to help the readers in reading the texts (such as prefaces and dedications) and may also have a decorative function, "pararrituals" are those rites or sequences in rituals that fulfill analogous functions (such as preliminary dedications in "sacrifices"). "Intertextuality" refers to the actual presence of one text within the other, for example by way of quotation, plagiarism, allusion, or even in the form of palimpsest; correspondingly, "interirritality" refers to these phenomena in the realm of rituals.³⁵ This is to be distinguished from "hypertextuality", which refers to the derivation of a secondary text from a pre-text ("hypotext") by way of transformation (e.g. parody) or imitation (e.g. pastiche); similar phenomena are to be observed in ritologiques where they are referred to as "hyperritritality".³⁶ I find these terms particularly useful as they open up possibilities for describing (inter-) relations of rituals, ritual orders, in a non-derogatory way. On the other hand, we must be

34 See Grimes 2003: "When a metaphor drops below awareness, those who employ it begin missing some of its implications."

35 This has partly been explored by Gladigow 2003 (under the general paradigm of "sequencing").

36 There are also other meanings of the term "hypertext" deriving from different discursive contexts. In computer-studies, the term was introduced to refer to electronic ways of non-sequential writing. Similarly, among other things, ritologiques studies non-sequential ways of orders of rituals.

aware of the restrictions imposed by the textual paradigm when applied to the field of ritual. Therefore, we will have to keep hunting for some complementary paradigms and metaphors.

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